

freedom. But whereas the riotous insolence of the upper military class went on increasing till it ended in the Wars of the Roses, the labour troubles of the fourteenth century were in the succeeding age brought to an end by gradual concessions.

The first step towards reform was taken in 1390, when the Statute of Labourers underwent considerable modification. The standard at which wages were fixed was abolished, and the assessment left in the hands of the Justices of the Peace.¹ A sliding scale, to be settled locally, was made the rule. The Act thus remodelled may have still been used for oppression, but it is probable that the Rising had taught authorities to respect the power of the labourers and to desist from annoying a formidable class by continual prosecutions.

The demand for personal freedom, which had been the chief cause of revolt, was for the moment crushed. The Parliament of November gratefully confirmed the King's repeal of the liberating charters. A unanimous vote of county and town members together contradicted all rumours that the emancipation of the serfs was seriously considered by Parliament.² The Rising had failed. But the process of manumission, which had been going on for so long, continued steadily during succeeding generations. Under the Tudors the last remains of serfage were swept away, and in James the First's reign it became a legal maxim that every Englishman was free. It must remain a matter of opinion whether this process was accelerated or retarded by the Peasants' Rising; it is impossible to apply hard facts to the solution of such a problem.

One effect of the rebellion was to put an end to all chance of philanthropic legislation in the direction of emancipating the serfs. Such proposals had been previously made in Parliament,³ though probably with little hope of success. They were never made there again. The ideal of freedom once had charms for a few of the upper classes, such as Wycliffe, who objected to hereditary bondage.⁴ This feeling

¹ *Stats. of Realm*, 13 B. II. 1, cap. 8. ² *Rot. Parl.*, iii. 100.
³ *Stats. of Realm*, 1 B. II., cap. 6; *Rot. Parl.*, iii. 99 6,
lines 57-8. * *De Dom. Civ.*, 240-8.